3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

THE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE ABKHASIANS

(From the materials on Abkhasian ethnography)

By N. S. JANASHIA

[A translation of the article published in *Khristianski Vostok*, The Christian East, Petrograd, 1915, vol. iv, No. 1, pp. 72–112.]

FOLLOWING the suggestion of N. Y. Marr that I should revise and translate into the Russian language my notes on "Materials on the ethnography of the Abkhasians", published 16–17 years ago in Georgian periodicals, chiefly in the journal *Moambe*, I made a careful review of all the collected "Materials", whether printed or still in manuscript form. In order to make the revision more complete I invited the aid of a special Commission from the Abkhasians of the village Adzvibzha, where the materials in question were actually collected. 114

The Commission consisted of the following persons: Mrs. Gidcha Janashia, my mother, with whose help the materials were checked originally; Kharikhan Tchengelia; Kelamat Delba, an eighty-year-old man, possessing a perfect knowledge of Abkhasian; Abdakhw Lolua, an orator; Alexis Dopua, who has a wide knowledge of tales and legends; Mushagw Tchengelia; and Alexis Janashia. The Commission worked with me for two days, the 2nd and 3rd July, 1914. 115

Furthermore, being still doubtful about certain aspects of my task, I checked the materials again at the meeting of the Adzvibzhuaans, during the month of August, and I found that all agreed in the main, differing only in matters of detail. One of my chief difficulties was that members of the Commission refused point blank to tell me tales I wanted to have in connection with my object, because "it is forbidden to tell tales in the daylight!" I therefore found it very hard to verify tales I had formerly taken down. So strong is the power of superstition nurtured for centuries! I am convinced that much that is incomprehensible in my "materials" would have been susceptible of explanation in the light of these tales. 124 [538] [128]

All the ceremonies and rites herein presented are described by a man who has taken an active part in their observance; at first, during his childhood, when he was imbued with profound religious feeling, and later in life when, although no longer professing "faith", he approached them with the greatest interest with a view to their study. I have endeavoured to record all the details, discovering in them curious survivals preserved through the popular beliefs and customs of the Abkhasians. In my opinion these details represent invaluable material for the scientific study of religious observance. 123

I was at one time very much tempted to use the material I had 121

3: Janashia I-5 (ca. 1900) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

already collected for the writing of a full-size monograph dealing with the religious beliefs and customs of the K'art's, Ibers, and Svans. However, after some reflection I decided that the time was not ripe for such a task as some necessary data were lacking and I therefore decided to publish only the notes. Here and there, however, I have not been able to restrain myself from touching upon certain considerations and inquiries belonging to the larger plane, and these have overflowed in the form of footnotes.

The founders of Christianity, realizing that it was not so easy after all to eradicate from the consciousness of the majority of the population religious beliefs and rites observed for thousands of years, endeavoured to transform them, by wrapping them up in their own clothing and so adapting them to the Christian feasts and saints; thus they established their own annual festivals. Wherever possible I have followed in my account the established order of church festivals.

I should further point out that all the material herein described was collected in one village only, namely, Adzvibzha, in southern Abkhasia (the province of Abzhua), which, according both to Georgian and foreign (for instance, of the missionary A. Lamberti) historical sources constituted until the second half of the seventeenth century, part of Megrelia. This accounts for the fact that the Megrelian influence is so strongly noticeable. I think it is quite possible that some of the beliefs herein described may be capable of a different interpretation in Northern Abkhasia.

I begin my notes with Àyt'ar. In the first place, however, it will be expedient to explain my views on the chief deity *antswd*,* God.

Antswd is a compound word, consisting of *an*, "mother," and *tswa* (*ratswd*)—"many," which together denote "many mothers" or simply "mothers"; the word is thus in the plural form.[1] "In a formal or grammatical sense," says Dcharaia, "it is not an error; only the word 'mother' forms in the plural *àntswa* and 'God'—*antswd*, i.e. the difference is in the accent. But in colloquial speech both words,

* The underlined *tsw* is a trigraph representing a sound uttered with one articulative effort or breath impulse, of which the digraph "*ts*" represents the front lingual affricate equivalent to German "*z*" (*Zeit*, time), and the labial semi-vowel "*w*", the labialization of the preceding "*ts*". "*Tsw*" thus represents a labialized variety of "*ts*". See N. Y. Marr, *The Abkhasian Analytical Alphabet* (in Russian), Leningrad, 1926, p. 31. [Translator's Note.]

[1] It would be premature at this stage to enter into the question of the identification of the conception "god", in Abkhasian, with "mother", and any attempt to give a morphological explanation of the form, which is incontestably the plural in *-tswa*, with the aid of the Abkhasian word *ratswa* would be superfluous (see N. Marr, *Definition of the Language of the Second Category of the Achaemenian Cuneiform Inscriptions* (in Russian), in *Zapiski* (Bulletin) of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archæological Society, St. Petersburg, 1915, §62. See also his *On the Origin of the Name Anapa* (in Russian). It is the usual linguistic method of the Abkhasians to interpret everything, even suffixes, such as the plural termination *-tswa* in the above instance, by means of the Abkhasian speech, with the aid of the Abkhasian words that survive to this day. [Note by the Editor of the *Kristianskii Vostok*.]

4: Janashia I-5 (1921) 1937 RI3 Abkhas RI3
Adzvibzha

THE ABKHASIAN NAME OF THE SUPREME BEING

By Simon Janashia

[Atranslation of the article published in Georgian in *Dsdisdsdeuli*—The Year Book, of the Georgian Philological Society, Tiflis, 1923–4, vol. i–ii, pp. 69–73.]

IT was Uslar who first observed that the Abkhasian name of the Supreme Being was in the plural.[1] He even quotes an example, i.e. *anɨswə dəuk'wa*,* the great God, lit. (*les*) *dieux grands*, in which the appearance of the adjective in the plural definitely testifies that, in the conception of the speaker, the ancient religious ideas—according to which God was not of one, but of many parts—were still in existence. The author remarks " only heathen Abkhasians say this ", the Chirstian and Muhammadan Abkhasians conceiving God quite definitely as the One, absolute Being.

Such an assertion was, perhaps, an excusable mistake on the part of the distinguished linguist, who was an orthodox Christian. It is impossible to divide the Abkhasians into such groups on the basis of their religious beliefs, despite the fact that formally they belong either to the Christian Church or to Islam. The example quoted by Uslar is probably one of those fortuitous discoveries whereby there suddenly emerges from the routine of ordinary usage a product of the national-spiritual creativeness belonging to the depths of the remote past.

Later, the same opinion (about the plural form) was put forward by Dcharaia [2] and Janashia.[3] The latter, however, thought that the word in question may have originated from the same *an*-root which in Abkhasian denotes the *mother*-notion.

Professor Marr shares only the first part of this view: he writes,[4] " . . . of great interest is the word *an*, god, which, in Abkhasian, appears usually as the plurale tantum *anɨswə*, God, lit. ' gods '."

In the summer of 1921, while in Abkhasia, in the village Adzvibzha (in Abzhua, the Kodor district), where I was sent by the Tiflis State University on a philological research study, I was able to collect certain data which threw more light on the question, as will be seen.

In the course of my research work, I was able to establish the validity of the formation of the word in question by the discovery

* For the pronunciation of *ɨsw* and *ə'w*, see p. 118, n. *, and p. 131, n. *. (Translator's note.)

[1] Uslar, P. K., *The Abkhasian Language* (in Russian). Tiflis, 1887, p. 78.

[2] Dcharaia, P., *On the Relation of the Abkhasian Language to the Japhetic Languages*, in *Materials for Japhetic Linguistics* (in Russian), St. Petersburg, 1913, vol. iv, pp. 31–3.

[3] Janashia, N., *The Religious Beliefs of the Abkhasians*, in *The Christian East* (in Russian), St. Pb., 1915, vol. iv, issue i, pp. 74–5. [See the English translation in this number, pp. 118–9. Ed.]

[4] Marr, N., *From a Linguistic Journey to Abkhasia* in *Izvestiya* (Bulletin) of the Imperial Academy of Sciences (in Russian), St. Pb., 1913, vol. vii, No. 6, p. 315.